



History And Development of the “Holy Ghost Devotee Church in Opokuma Clan” Kolokuma/Opokuma Local Government Area, Bayelsa State

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Abstract

This paper is meant to discuss and document the history and development of the Holy Ghost Devotees Church in Opokuma Clan Kolokuma/Opokuma Local Government Area in Bayelsa State. The problem that motivated the researcher to carry out the research is that the church is a new branch or ministry in the state that broke out from the Catholic Church U.S.A. and it's patterned after the African-churches or in other words, white garment churches' but its origin and development in the area of study have not been documented. The researcher used the historical, theological and sociological approaches to carry out the study. From the findings, the researcher discovered that the first branch of the church that is the one in Opokuma community, in the Niger Delta was founded in 1957 by one late Godfery Allision an indigene of Akaranbiri community in Opokuma Clan. He was a civil servant with the Federal Ministry of Mines and Power and his station was in Nasarawa town, the capital of Nasarawa State. However, he got involved with the activities of the first Headquarters of the church in the North, Jos in Plateau state, where he also had a stint in his service with the Ministry of Mines and Power and when he finally retired and returned home to Opokuma, he decided to establish the church in his home town, Opokuma. His very early converts to the ministry were about six of them and today the church has spread to other communities and even beyond, but with Opokuma Town as the Headquarters in Bayelsa State. The church has now been planted in the North-Eastern; North-Western, South-Eastern and South-western districts of Izon land, Nigeria. Each district is headed by an apostle who oversees the various branches in his respectful district. As a result of the activities and size of the church presently, the author is recommending that the ministry be encouraged to thrive because through it, the people of Opokuma have benefited a lot. The church is into human capital development of the indigenes in the various areas where its branches have been sited and humanitarian activities as well. The benefit of the church to the Opokuma people is indeed enormous. The indigenes and other believers in other religious traditions for example African traditional Religion and even other Christian religious groups or denominations be encouraged to identify with the ministry because its doctrines are in tandem with the culture of the Ijaw people and Africa generally. Researchers are also encouraged to do further research on the Holy Ghost Devotees Church to improve on the gap that may not have been covered in this study.

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this research is on the documentation of the spread of the Holy Ghost Devotees Church in Opokuma Clan. There are three basic key concepts surrounding the focus of the study, History, Church and Church History. History is the study of the most important events of the past, the present and the prediction of the future. According to Chief Abunah Timineri, (oral Interview) he said “history is the records of important events which have taken place in the society and the prediction of the future and that is what we mean by History”.

Everyone at one point in time or another has been told stories of the important events of the past, the present, and the prediction of the future. We always enjoy listening to stories about what our fathers and ancestors did. Human existence on earth dates back to thousands of years. Over this period, there have been countless events and activities. Some of these

things are not important; many, however, are very important because they greatly affect the lives of the inhabitants of where they occurred. The establishments of the Holy Ghost Devotees Church is one of the most important events which have occurred in Opokuma Clan because it has greatly affected the lives of the inhabitants and so it is imperative to document the history of the Holy Ghost Devotees Church in Opokuma, and how it has affected the lives of the inhabitants of Opokuma Clan physically, religiously, economically, spiritually and politically as this area has been neglected in scholarship.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

From recorded history, religion plays a significant role in either the emergence or the decline of any community or society. Therefore, since very little is known about the history of Holy Ghost Devotee church in Opokuma Clan, the researcher hopes to use this essay to solve that problem of lack material on the subject matter, and also to add to the knowledge of the already existing works on Opokuma Clan.

1.3 Scope of the Study

The scope of this paper is restricted to the History of Holy Ghost Devotees Church in Opokuma Clan, how the Holy Ghost Devotees Church came into existence in Opokuma community and its environs, names of the early converts who started the church and how much the church has impacted on the lives of the Opokuma people.

Since the study deals with church history, a brief history of the people of Opokuma clan, her origin and their ethnicity is considered as part of the scope of the study.

Research Methodology

The methodology used for this study is the historical, theological and sociological methods. Methodological approaches seeks to interpret the text that forms the basis of research study. In doing this, the research methodologies used for the collection of data for the study depends largely on participant observation, primary and secondary data.

The primary source includes oral interview while the secondary sources depended on textbooks and internet materials.

Significance of the Study

This study will be of great importance to academic because it would shed more understanding on the History of Holy Ghost Devotees church in Opokuma Clan and the Niger Delta at large. The literature that the work will generate will add new materials to the body of knowledge because, this is a pioneer work on the history of the Holy Ghost Devotee Church in the area.

Secondly, the Holy Ghost Devotees Church in Opokuma Clan serves as a basis of response to the unity of the Opokuma people, especially as contained in our Lord's Pastoral Prayer: "That they may be one" (John 17:21). It also promotes understanding, peace and unity among the people and this is done through the propagation of its peculiar type of gospel by the believers. The study is very important to the people because it will act as a liaison committee, by means of which its members-Christians can consult together and when necessary, make common statement and take common front line; and to act as watch-men for the spiritual and moral welfare of the people.

Literature Review

The purpose of this review is to examine critically what scholars have written about church and church history. This would enable us to have a better understanding of the history of The Ghost Devotees Church in Opokuma clan. The review will encompass, origin of church as a body of Christ, and its development in the world generally and a little bit of the definition of history among others.

Evans Prichard as cited in Emmanuel (2023) in one of her submissions said that; "history is an umbrella term that relates to past events as well as the memory, discovery, collection, organization, presentation, and interpretation of information about these events". History is an important part of the academic discipline which uses a narrative to examine and analyse a sequence of past events, and objectively determine the patterns of cause and effect that determine them. Brian Buckes as cited by Emmanuel (2023) also stated that: "a history of the world is the memory of the past experience of homosapiens".

Having seen what scholars have written about history, it is pertinent to critically examine church and church history. Robyn Friedman as cited by Emmanuel (2023) define church as "a gathering of believers who come from their various homes to begin a new life style."

According to (SDA) Seven-Day Adventist Bible Dictionary, (1976) "the church is a body of people who believed in Jesus as the messiah and joined to the organization by him". The Bible says in the book of Mathew 16:18); that "and I

tell you, you are Peter, and on the rock, I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it". The book of (Ephesians 2:19-22) says: "So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens of the house hold of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grow into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built for as a dwelling place of God in the spirit".

Fatokun (1999) stated that;

The Christian church can be rightly described as an offshoot of Judaism. He also avers that, the church was found and built through the agency of the holy spirit in the upper-room in Jerusalem during the celebration of the famous Jewish festival of Pentecost in about A.D. 30-barely ten days after the Lord's glorious ascension.

Ayeboyin, Deji and Ademola (1970) avers that, indigenous churches of which the Holy Ghost Devotee Church belongs are often characterized negatively as separatists because some of them originated through a variety of Schismatic process within western oriented mission churches.

The Christian church was born in a world that was already old. Great empires have risen and fallen for example the glorious Egypt, Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyria, Persia, and Greece that lay centuries in the past; now it is Rome, the greatest of the ancient empires, that governed the civilized world. That church history is the interested record of the origin, progress, and impact of Christianity on human society based on organized data gathered by scientific method from archaeological, documentary or living sources.

Robyn as earlier asserted that; "church history is a new way of life that appealed to people greatly as a result of its message of moral uprightness, peaceful co-existence, joy, and fair treatment of one another. Many people conceive Christianity not just as another religion but the best way of life so far to be desired."

Church history or the history of the Christian faith began about 30 Ad as ealier indicated in Palestine, with a small number of Jews and Jewish proselytes, about 120 according to Acts 1:15, following the resurrection of Jesus Christ by the third century AD. Christianity has now grown to become the dominant religion of the Northern Mediterranean world. It also gained extension to the eastern and southern part of the world.

The study of Church History is very important as it serves as one's faith builder in Christ Jesus and by faith, in Christ one is justified.

Justification by faith as presented by St. Paul in (Romans 5:1-11) is for Christians to know that they are no longer under the law but under grace. They would only be justified by having strong faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and the redemption He offers mankind through His blood. We receive the Gospel of Jesus Christ and by being at peace with God and Mankind.

The OPokuma People

Opokuma is a major Ijo (Izon) speaking clan in Kolokuma/Opokuma Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. Opokuma Clan is made up of Ten autonomous towns namely; Abuwari, Gbaran-Ama, Ayakoroama, Orubiri, Ofonibiri, Igbainwari, Ekpuwari, Oyobu, Gbaranbiri and Akaranbiri. All these towns are situated along the bank of River Nun, a tributary of the great River Niger.

The founders of the twin clans, Kolokuma and Opokuma were said to be the children of one father Izon. The history of Opukuma runs parallel to those of kolokuma. The two brothers were said to have got separated at Agadagbabou where their father first settled and Opokumaawei the first son left ahead of Kolokumaawei the junior to look for his own place of settlement. Opokumaawei first settled at a place called Ofonibiri before finding the head village of the clan Okowari on the Nun-River. Abraham Ogboru in an oral interview credited the founding of Okowari to "Ise" a son of Opuokun or Opokumaawei who was said to be a giant in height and at the same time a warrior. While S. K. Owonaro in his book titled *the History of Ijaw*, published in 1949 credited the foundingof Okowari to Opuokun himself not one of his sons Ise as claimed by some sources.

As it was in those days according Owanaru, there were series of migrations. So many people migrated to join Okowari in its new settlement site. Among these migrants were Gbaranama people, Ofonibiri, Akanaranbiri, Oyobu, Igbainwari and Gbaranbiri. The original children of Oko the founder of Okowari were Abu, Oru and Bila. Abu founded the town called Abuwari, Oru founded Orubiri, while Bila founded Bilawari which formed Ayakoroma.

The prior arrival of Opokuma on the bank of Nun River gave Opokuma the seniority position and as a senior, Opokuma is now so much smaller than Kolokuma. The reason for the smaller status of Opokuma is explained by a disaster. According to Owonaro “Opokuma soon grew up to be a populous clan, but a peirlious under current in a lake swept away hundreds of them during a fishing expedition and decreased the population of the town and that incident is still remembered today with the celebration of a festival known as the *ondefia* seko fishing festival till this day among the Opokuma people. Within the Opokuma *Ibe*, Akaranbiri tradition claimed that their ancestor, Akanaran was the first to settle on this part of the Nun River (Owonaru 1949).

The History of Holy Ghost Devotees Church in Opokuma Clan

This part of the essay takes a panoramic view of the Holy Ghost Devotees Church in Opokuma Clan paying specific attention on her historical origin, expansion, achievements, and influence on the life of Opokuma people. It also examines the factors as well as the agencies responsible for the dynamic growth of the church in Opokuma community.

Holy Ghost Devotees Church was the third Christian church to be established in Opokuma Clan. Holy Ghost Devotees Church Opokuma branch was founded in 1957 by one Late Mr. Godfrey Allison Ebifegha. Mr. G. A. Ebifegha was an indigene of Agala-wari family in Akaranbiri town of Opokuma Clan. He was a civil servant in the Mines Department, now Federal Ministry of Mines and Powers, who lived in Nasarawa town in the Northern part of Nigeria. Then a staunch member of the Anglican Church, he started his Christian life in Nasarawa. According to history, the founder of Holy Ghost Devotees Church, Opokoma branch got in contact with a branch of the church in Nigeria as a country and it was first established in Jos in the North but when he returned to his village, he established a branch of his own in Opokuma Clan, and the church was incorporated in Nigeria with registration number 2155.

The Growth of Holy Ghost Devotees Church

Late Mr. G.A Ebifegha started the church with his family in the parlour of his mud house. The church in her early stage does not attract people and worshippers due to the level of poverty and illiteracy in the community. These do not pose as the only obstacles, since the church was the third attempt at bringing a new religion that is Christianity to the people. But when the people heard of the preaching and teaching of Mr. G.A Ebifegha, they were amazed, that is because the preaching of the former Christian churches that were first established in the community were totally a contradiction to the traditional beliefs and practices of the people, but the preaching of the church in question in tandem with their culture so they had to embrace it.

Some of the early converts who started the church with Mr. G.A Ebifegha were late His Holiness Ugulah London Gaza [who later founded his own branch of the church, known as The Holy Ghost Believers Church, Late Apostle Abraham Ogboindi, Mark Wadi, Apostle Stephen Agbida, and Most Snr Prophet.S. Ebifegha. It was very unfortunate that after the death of Mr. G.A Ebifegha, the church almost fissioned out not until Late Emmanuel Ebifegha, the brother to the founder revived it. It was during his reign that the church raised fund and set up its own building from Ibifeghegha’s mud building to a modern structure which is now well furnished, (Emmanuel, 2023).

Beliefs and practices of the Church

In consonance with the teaching of the Holy scripture, the church believes in the following practices, they are;

- The belief in Holy trinity of God: - the father, son and the Holy Ghost as recorded in the Bible Book of (Gen. 17: 1-2, 1 Cor. 6:17-18, Rev, 1:8, Matt. 3:16-17).
- The Belief in the revelation of Holy Spirit filled person- (Prov. 29:18, Dan. 4:8, 9,18, 5:11-12, Psalm 74:9, and Lam. 2:91).
- The belief in Jesus Christ as the son or word of God and His virgin Birth (1John 3:5, Matt 1:18-20, Mark 16:9).
- The belief in the Holy Ghost or Spirit (Matt 3:16).
- The belief in the verbal inspiration of the Holy Bible or scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16,17) and the belief in the atonement of the Blood of Jesus Christ (Romans 5:10,11).
- Others are the belief of the spirit filled life. (Ezekiel 36:27 and St John 14:16-17 and St. John 20:21 and 22).
- The belief in the Great tribulation and Spiritual salvation through faith (Rev. 3:20, Romans 8:9, Gal. 2:16).
- The belief in the resurrection of the dead. (Matt. 5:28-29).
- The belief in the body of Jesus Christ (the Church) consisting of Saints. (1st Cor. 12:27, Eph. 5:23, 1:22-23).
- The belief in the second great tribulation, (1thessalonians. 4:13-15, Rev. 20:5-6).
- The belief in the existence of Eternal Paradise (Heaven) and in the Eternal damnation in hell of those who Jesus Christ would rejects, (2Cor. 12:4, St John 14:2-3, Heb. 4:9).
- The belief in the pre-millennial coming of Christ and in His Millennial reign (1thess. 4:16-17, Rev. 20:4) and lastly
- The belief in the maintaining of spiritual purity of the body of the church of Christ (Phil. 4:8,9, and Romans 8 and 12, 1cor. 14:12).

Conclusion

In this paper, we have attempted to document the origin, history and development of the Holy Ghost Devotees Church in Opokuma Clan, Kolokuma Opokuma Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. The church founded by a handful of persons has spread to other areas of Izon land and even beyond.

The church in question have been involved in humanitarian activities, peace building and spiritual development of individuals etcetera, in the area of our study in such a way that it will not be an overstatement for us to say that its establishment among the people is of a blessing rather than a curse.

Sequel to the benevolent disposition of the church in the area and even beyond, the author is recommending that the existence of the church in the area be encouraged. The doctrine of the church too according to the findings of the researcher is in tandem with the culture and tradition of the Ijaw people and in general, Africa hence the recommendation that people be encouraged to embrace or identify with the church and its activities.

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